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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0472

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PGOV MP
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - APRIL 14 - SUMMARY

REF: PORT LOUIS 0436 (DTG 071218Z APR 78)
PORT LOUIS A-30, APRIL 14, 1978

1.PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM'S GOVERNMENT CAME CLOSE TO LOSING A KEY VOTE IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY THIS WEEK, OWING TO THE THREATENED DEFECTION OF SONE OF HIS OWN LABOR PARTY DEPUTIES. AN ADVERSE VOTE COULD HAVE CAUSED RAMGOOLAM TO RESIGN OR TO CALL NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS, BOTH OF WHICH HE THREATENED TO DO IN ORDER TO BRING THE DISSIDENTS TO HEEL. THE ISSUE WAS AN ITEM IN A SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL APPROVING THE APPOINTMENT TO DIPLOMATIC POSTS ABROAD OF THREE DEFEATED CANDIDATES, TO WHOM RAMGOOLAM FEELS HE OWES A POLITICAL DEBT. THOUGH THE ITEM ITSELF WAS NOT ALL THAT IMPORTANT, IT BROUGHT TO A HEAD THE EFFORT OF THE BOODHOO
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GROUP OF DISSIDENT YOUNG LABOR DEPUTIES TO REFOGM GOVERNMENT AND PARTY POLICIES. THEY CONSIDERED THIS TYPE OF POLITICAL PAY-OFF THE SORT OF "CORRUPTION" WHICH HAS GIVEN THE LABOR PARTY A BAD IMAGE AND WHICH PLAYED INTO THE HANDS OF THE OPPOSITION MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM) IN THE LAST ELECTIONS. FOR HIS PART, RAMGOOLAM'S AUTHORITY WASHBEING SERIOUSLY QUESTIONED AND HE FELT HE COULD NOT AFFORD TO

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GIVE IN TO THE DISSIDENTS.

2. ON THE EVE OF THE CRUCIAL APRIL 11 SESSION OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY, IT BECAME KNOWN THAT THE MAURITIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY (PMSD) COALITION PARTNER WAS ALSO OPPOSED TO THESE CONTROVERSIAL APPOINTMENTS. EVEN MORE SIGNIFICANT WAS THE DEFECTION OF THE NUMBER THREE MAN IN THE GOVERNMENT, AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL, WHO PUBLICLY VOICED OPPOSITION TO THE APPOINTMENTS. HOWEVER, IT WAS BOOLELL WHO SUCCESSFULLY NEGOTIATED A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE CONTESTANTS, WINNING THE BOODHOO GROUP'S AGREEMENT TO VOTE IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT IN RETURN FOR RAMGOOLAM'S PROMISE TO RECONSIDER THE APPOINTMENTS AND POSSIBLY CANCEL THEM (AT THE HIGH COST OF COMPENSATING THE APPOINTEES, WHO HAVE FIVE YEAR CONTRACTS).

3. THE APRIL 11 SESSION WAS TENSE AS WELL AS DRAMATIC.
AFTER A NUMBER OF MMM ORATORS HAD SPOKEN AGAINST THE CONTROVERSIAL ITEM, USING SARCASTIC AND ABUSIVE LANGUAGE AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, A LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE ALSO ROSE TO SPEAK AGAINST THE APPOINTMENTS. THESE INCLUDED THE FIVE DISSIDENT DEPUTIES, BOOLELL, REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PMSD GROUP, AND A COUPLE OF OTHER DEPUTIES WHO HAD NOT FORMERLY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH THE DISSIDENT GROUP. HOWEVER, THEY ALL INDICATED THAT THEY WOULD SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT ON THE ISSUE, DESPITE THEIR FEELINGS ABOUT THE APPOINTMENTS, IN ORDER NOT TO PLAY INTO
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THE HANDS OF THE OPPOSITION AND BRING ABOUT THE DOWNFALL OF THE GOVERNMENT. RAMGOOLAM THEN PROMISED TO RECONSIDER THE APPOINTMENTS "IF NECESSARY" AFTER CASTIGATING HIS OPPONENTS FOR DISPLAYING A "COLONIAL MENTALITY." THE VOTE WAS 36 TO 31 IN FAVOR OF THE GOVERNMENT.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THE DISSENSION WITHIN THE LABOR PARTY WILL CONTINUE AND MAY BECOME EVEN MORE SERIOUS, NEW ELECTIONS ARE UNLIKELY, AS BOTH LABOR AND THE PMSD FEAR THAT THE MMM COULD WIN THEM. THE PRIME MINISTER WILL MOST LIKELY FIND HIMSELF HAVING TO MAKE MORE AND MORE COMPROMISES WITH THE DISSIDENTS IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THEIR SUPPORT. HE IS DISPLAYING WEARINESS AND IRRITATION AT THE NEED -- A NEW EXPERIENCE IN HIS POLITICAL CAREER -- TO COMPROMISE WITH THE BACK-BENCHERS AND HIS COALITION PARTNERS, A SITUATION FORCED ON HIM BY THE THINNESS OF HIS PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. END COMMENT.
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